

Message Text

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AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL BRISBANE

AMCONSUL PERTH

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, AS

SUBJ: ANTI-LABOR RURAL ACTION GROUP

1. AS REPORTED IN PRESS, THERE WAS A RALLY OF SOME 4,000
NEW SOUTH WALES AND QUEENSLAND FARMERS IN MOREE, NORTHERN
NEW SOUTH WALES, WHICH ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, LISTENED TO
SPEECHES CONDEMNING AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT FOR
BIAS AGAINST COUNTRY DISTRICTS. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS,
SPEAKERS DEMANDED RENEGOTIATION OF WHEAT STABILIZATION PROGRAM,
RE-INTRODUCTION OF SUPERPHOSPHATE BOUNTIES, AND RELIEF FROM ALLEGED
DISCRIMINATION ON TELEPHONE RATES AND FREIGHT DIFFERENTIALS,
ETC. RALLY WAS ADDRESSED BY MICHAEL DARBY, RECENTLY RESIGNED
ARMY CAPTAIN WHO STOOD FOR WHITLAM'S SEAT IN MAY FEDERAL
ELECTION. DARBY IS BECOMING WELL KNOWN AS CONSERVATIVE CRUSADER
AND LAST WEEK ADDRESSED A MEETING IN SYDNEY TOWN HALL CALLING
FOR SECRET VOTING IN TRADE UNION DISPUTES. THE RALLY AT MOREE
WAS CONDUCTED IN THE NAME OF "NATIONAL ACTION GROUP" WHICH SOME
LABOR SOURCES HAVE SUGGESTED IS THE BEGINNING OF A RIGHT WING
VIGILANTE MOVEMENT, WHICH IS DENIED BY DARBY WHO SPOKE AGAINST
VIGILANTISM AT MOREE. VARIOUS SOURCES INDICATE THE MEETING
AT MOREE MAY BE ONLY THE FIRST OF A NUMBER REFLECTING A
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SWELL OF ANTI-FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FEELING IN COUNTRY

DISTRICTS.

2. RESPONSIBLE LEADERS OF THE NSW L/CP GOVERNMENT DISCLAIM ANY ASSOCIATION WITH NATIONAL ACTION GROUP AND DEPUTY PREMIER AND STATE COUNTRY PARTY LEADER, SIR CHARLES CUTLER, HAS INDIRECTLY CRITICIZED THE GROUP FOR REPORTED THREATS TO CONDUCT A COUNTRY BOYCOTT OF CITY MARKETS IN PROTEST AGAINST WHITLAM GOVERNMENT. WHILE CUTLER WENT ON TO SYMPATHIZE WITH THE FARMERS GRIEVANCES, HE CAME DOWN FIRMLY ON THE SIDE OF SEEKING REDRESS THROUGH THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM BY TRADITIONAL MEANS OF LAW AND ORDER. HE ADDED THAT THE SYSTEM "HAS BEEN SARELY TESTED BY ANARCHISTS AND EXTREME LEFT UNIONISTS IN OUR SOCIETY."

3. LIBERAL PARTY MEMBERS OF NSW PARLIAMENT, BARRACLOUGH AND MASON, BOTH EXPRESS SKEPTICISM REGARDING NATIONAL ACTION GROUP AND OTHER SIMILAR TYPES OF MOVEMENT, ARGUING THAT THE PROPER RECOURSE IS THROUGH REGULAR POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITY, BUT BOTH ALSO EXPRESS SYMPATHY FOR GRIEVANCES FELT BY RURAL PEOPLE POINTING OUT THAT WHILE IT IS ACCEPTED THAT UNIONISTS CAN GO ON STRIKE AND STOP PETROL SUPPLIES TO THE PUBLIC, YET A COMPARABLE THREAT OF A FARMER'S STRIKE IS DENOUNCED AS RIGHT WING EXTREMISM. FORMER SOLICITOR GENERAL OF AUSTRALIA, ELLICOTT, NOW LIBERAL FEDERAL M.P. FROM SYDNEY, OBSERVED MOREE RALLY WITHOUT BEING RECOGNIZED HIMSELF, AND JUDGED THAT IT WAS RESPONSIBLY WELL RUN ALTHOUGH ELLICOTT, LIKE THE OTHERS, IS SKEPTICAL OF DARBY. MASON SAYS THERE WILL BE MORE SUCH MEETINGS AND ONE HAS ALREADY OCCURRED IN HIS CONSTITUENCY OF DUBBO TO WHICH HE WAS INVITED BUT DID NOT ATTEND.

4. COUNTRY PARTY M.P. LEON PUNCH, NSW MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, REFLECTS SIMILAR WARINESS OF BOTH THE DIRECTION OF SUCH RALLIES AND OF DARBY, BUT SYMPATHY, FOR LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES OF RURAL PEOPLE. FOR TIME BEING, SAID PUNCH, THESE RURAL RALLIES PRESENT NO THREAT OF COMPETITION TO THE COUNTRY PARTY ALTHOUGH THEY DEPEND MAINLY ON THE COUNTRY PARTY'S CONSTITUENCY FOR SUPPORT. COUNTRY PARTY LEADERSHIP HOPES TO REDIRECT LEGITIMATE RURAL POLITICAL ENERGIES THROUGH RESPONSIBLE TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS THE

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GRAZIERS ASSOCIATION AND UNITED FARMERS AND WOOL GROWERS ASSOCIATION RATHER THAN NOISY MASS MEETINGS OF THE MOREE TYPE. PUNCH RECOGNIZED THERE IS A POSSIBILITY OF EXTREME RIGHT WING EXPLOITATION AND MENTIONED ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS LEAGUE OF RIGHTS AND THE SOCIETY FOR FREE AUSTRALIA.

5. COMMENT: WHILE THESE MANIFESTATIONS ARE STILL IN AN INCIPENT STAGE AND MAY NOT REPEAT NOT BECOME SERIOUS,

THEY DO REFLECT AN INTENSIFICATION OF RURAL ANTI-PATHY WHICH COULD, UNDER PROGRESSIVELY DETERIORATING CIRCUMSTANCES, BE LINKED UP WITH OTHER CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS AND PERHAPS BE EXPLOITED BY A NEW EXTREME RIGHT WINGERS. LABOR INTIMATIONS OF BURGEONING VIGILANTISM APPEAR TO BE GREATLY OVER-STATED. NEVERTHELESS, THESE EVENTS DO REFLECT AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE TROUBLES FACING THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT.

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